

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

WILLIE HARRIS,

Plaintiff,

Hon. Janet T. Neff

v.

Case No. 1:13-CV-543

CATHY STODDARD, et al.,

Defendants.

_____ /

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

This matter is before the Court on Defendants' Motion for Summary Judgment. (Dkt. #59). Plaintiff initiated the present action on April 12, 2013, against twenty-five (25) known individuals and two (2) unidentified individuals alleging various claims that his constitutional rights had been violated. On September 10, 2013, the Honorable Janet T. Neff dismissed a great many of Plaintiff's claims. (Dkt. #24-25). The fifteen (15) remaining defendants now move for summary judgment on the ground that Plaintiff has failed to properly exhaust his remaining claims against them. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B), the undersigned recommends that Defendants' motion be **denied**. The undersigned also recommends that Plaintiff's claims against the two (2) unidentified defendants be **dismissed**.

SUMMARY JUDGMENT STANDARD

Summary judgment "shall" be granted "if the movant shows that there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law." Fed. R. Civ.

P. 56(a). A party moving for summary judgment can satisfy its burden by demonstrating “that the respondent, having had sufficient opportunity for discovery, has no evidence to support an essential element of his or her case.” *Minadeo v. ICI Paints*, 398 F.3d 751, 761 (6th Cir. 2005); *see also*, *Amini v. Oberlin College*, 440 F.3d 350, 357 (6th Cir. 2006) (quoting *Celotex Corp. v. Catrett*, 477 U.S. 317, 325 (1986)). The fact that the evidence may be controlled or possessed by the moving party does not change the non-moving party’s burden “to show sufficient evidence from which a jury could reasonably find in her favor, again, so long as she has had a full opportunity to conduct discovery.” *Minadeo*, 398 F.3d at 761 (quoting *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 257 (1986)).

Once the moving party demonstrates that “there is an absence of evidence to support the nonmoving party’s case,” the non-moving party “must identify specific facts that can be established by admissible evidence, which demonstrate a genuine issue for trial.” *Amini*, 440 F.3d at 357 (citing *Anderson*, 477 U.S. at 247-48; *Celotex Corp. v. Catrett*, 477 U.S. at 324). While the Court must view the evidence in the light most favorable to the non-moving party, the party opposing the summary judgment motion “must do more than simply show that there is some metaphysical doubt as to the material facts.” *Amini*, 440 F.3d at 357. The existence of a mere “scintilla of evidence” in support of the non-moving party’s position is insufficient. *Daniels v. Woodside*, 396 F.3d 730, 734-35 (6th Cir. 2005) (quoting *Anderson*, 477 U.S. at 252). The non-moving party “may not rest upon [his] mere allegations,” but must instead present “significant probative evidence” establishing that “there is a genuine issue for trial.” *Pack v. Damon Corp.*, 434 F.3d 810, 813-14 (6th Cir. 2006) (citations omitted).

Moreover, the non-moving party cannot defeat a properly supported motion for summary judgment by “simply arguing that it relies solely or in part upon credibility determinations.” *Fogerty v. MGM Group Holdings Corp., Inc.*, 379 F.3d 348, 353 (6th Cir. 2004). Rather, the non-moving party

“must be able to point to some facts which may or will entitle him to judgment, or refute the proof of the moving party in some material portion, and. . .may not merely recite the incantation, ‘Credibility,’ and have a trial on the hope that a jury may disbelieve factually uncontested proof.” *Id.* at 353-54. In sum, summary judgment is appropriate “against a party who fails to make a showing sufficient to establish the existence of an element essential to that party’s case, and on which that party will bear the burden of proof at trial.” *Daniels*, 396 F.3d at 735.

While a moving party without the burden of proof need only show that the opponent cannot sustain his burden at trial, *see Morris v. Oldham County Fiscal Court*, 201 F.3d 784, 787 (6th Cir. 2000); *Minadeo*, 398 F.3d at 761, a moving party with the burden of proof faces a “substantially higher hurdle.” *Arnett v. Myers*, 281 F.3d 552, 561 (6th Cir. 2002); *Cockrel v. Shelby County Sch. Dist.*, 270 F.3d 1036, 1056 (6th Cir. 2001). “Where the moving party has the burden -- the plaintiff on a claim for relief or the defendant on an affirmative defense -- his showing must be sufficient for the court to hold that no reasonable trier of fact could find other than for the moving party.” *Calderone v. United States*, 799 F.2d 254, 259 (6th Cir. 1986) (quoting W. SCHWARZER, *Summary Judgment Under the Federal Rules: Defining Genuine Issues of Material Fact*, 99 F.R.D. 465, 487-88 (1984)). The Sixth Circuit has repeatedly emphasized that the party with the burden of proof “must show the record contains evidence satisfying the burden of persuasion and that the evidence is so powerful that no reasonable jury would be free to disbelieve it.” *Arnett*, 281 F.3d at 561 (quoting 11 JAMES WILLIAM MOORE, ET AL., *MOORE’S FEDERAL PRACTICE* § 56.13[1], at 56-138 (3d ed. 2000); *Cockrel*, 270 F.2d at 1056 (same). Accordingly, summary judgment in favor of the party with the burden of persuasion “is inappropriate when the evidence is susceptible of different interpretations or inferences by the trier of fact.” *Hunt v. Cromartie*, 526 U.S. 541, 553 (1999).

ANALYSIS

I. Defendants' Motion for Summary Judgment

Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a), a prisoner asserting an action with respect to prison conditions under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 must first exhaust all available administrative remedies. *See Porter v. Nussle*, 534 U.S. 516, 524 (2002). Prisoners are no longer required to demonstrate exhaustion in their complaints. *See Jones v. Bock*, 549 U.S. 199, 216 (2007). Instead, failure to exhaust administrative remedies is “an affirmative defense under the PLRA” which the defendant bears the burden of establishing. *Id.* With respect to what constitutes proper exhaustion, the Supreme Court has stated that “the PLRA exhaustion requirement requires proper exhaustion” defined as “compliance with an agency’s deadlines and other critical procedural rules.” *Woodford v. Ngo*, 548 U.S. 81, 90-93 (2006). In *Bock*, the Court reiterated that

Compliance with prison grievance procedures, therefore, is all that is required by the PLRA to ‘properly exhaust.’ The level of detail necessary in a grievance to comply with the grievance procedures will vary from system to system and claim to claim, but it is the prison’s requirements, and not the PLRA, that define the boundaries of proper exhaustion.

Bock, 549 U.S. at 218.

According to MDOC policy, “[t]he total grievance process from the point of filing a Step I grievance to providing a Step III response shall generally be completed within 120 calendar days unless an extension has been approved in writing by the Grievance Coordinator at Step I and/or Step II.” Mich. Dep’t. of Corr., Policy Directive 03.02.130 ¶ S (effective July 9, 2007). MDOC policy further provides that if prison officials fail to timely respond to a grievance, the inmate may proceed to the next step in the grievance process. *See* Mich. Dep’t. of Corr., Policy Directive 03.02.130 ¶ T.

In support of their motion, Defendants have submitted evidence that Plaintiff has failed to pursue through all three steps of the grievance process any grievance concerning his remaining claims. (Dkt. #60, Exhibits B-C). In response, Plaintiff has submitted two affidavits in which he asserts that he attempted on numerous occasions to properly exhaust the claims in question, but was thwarted by prison staff. (Dkt. #61, 65). Specifically, Plaintiff asserts that the grievance coordinator denied “many” of his requests for grievance forms. Plaintiff further asserts that Defendants “destroyed” grievances that he attempted to submit. Plaintiff also asserted in his verified complaint similar claims of interference, by Defendants and others, with his attempts to properly exhaust the claims in question. Defendants have not responded to Plaintiff’s submissions. The evidence submitted by Plaintiff creates a genuine issue of material fact on the question of exhaustion. As previously noted, exhaustion is an affirmative defense on which Defendants bear the burden. In light of the evidence submitted by Plaintiff, the Court finds that Defendants have failed to carry their burden. Accordingly, the undersigned recommends that Defendants’ motions be denied.

II. Unidentified Defendants

Plaintiff has also asserted claims against Unknown Party #1 and Unknown Party #2. Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 4(c) indicates that “[a] summons must be served with a copy of the complaint.” The time frame within which service must be effected is articulated in Rule 4(m), which provides that if service of the summons and complaint is not made upon a defendant within 120 days after the filing of the complaint, “the court - on motion or on its own initiative after notice to the plaintiff - must dismiss the action without prejudice against that defendant or order that service be made within a specified time.” *See also, Abel v. Harp*, 122 Fed. Appx. 248, 250 (6th Cir., Feb. 16, 2005) (“[a]bsent

a showing of good cause to justify a failure to effect timely service, the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure *compel* dismissal”) (emphasis added); *Clemons v. Soeltner*, 652 Fed. Appx. 81, 82 (6th Cir., Mar. 26, 2003) (if the plaintiff demonstrates good cause for such failure, the court *may* extend the time for service).

Plaintiff initiated the present action more than one year ago. Since that time, Plaintiff has failed to identify the two unknown individuals in question. Plaintiff has likewise failed to request an extension of time to effect service on these individuals. Considering Plaintiff’s lack of diligence in this matter, the undersigned recommends that Plaintiff’s claims against Unknown Party #1 and Unknown Party #2 be dismissed without prejudice for failure to timely effect service.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons articulated herein, the undersigned recommends that Defendants’ Motion for Summary Judgment, (Dkt. #59), be **denied**. The undersigned also recommends that Plaintiff’s claims against Unknown Party #1 and Unknown Party #2 be **dismissed without prejudice** for failure to timely effect service.

OBJECTIONS to this Report and Recommendation must be filed with the Clerk of Court within fourteen (14) days of the date of service of this notice. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C). Failure to file objections within the specified time waives the right to appeal the District Court’s order. *See Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *United States v. Walters*, 638 F.2d 947 (6th Cir.1981).

Respectfully submitted,

Date: August 12, 2014

/s/ Ellen S. Carmody
ELLEN S. CARMODY
United States Magistrate Judge